

EDITORIAL

MOVEMENT: A PATH TO HEALING

Do you feel like dancing when you hear a musical beat?

That natural urge to move is not just about fun or celebration. It is your body's way of releasing stress and expressing emotions. Across cultures, dance has long been used to heal, connect, and restore balance. Today, this age-old understanding is supported by a therapeutic approach known as **Dance Movement Therapy (DMT)**.

Dance Movement Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses movement to support emotional expression, self-awareness, and psychological healing. Like other therapeutic approaches—such as cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, or mindfulness-based practices -

- DMT aims to improve mental well-being. **What sets it apart is its starting point: the body.** While many therapies work primarily through words and thought patterns, DMT recognizes that emotions are often stored and expressed physically, even before they can be spoken.

This makes DMT particularly valuable for individuals who struggle with verbal expression or feel disconnected from their bodies. Through guided and intentional movement, people can access emotions safely, regulate their nervous system, and process experiences at a sensory level. Research and clinical practice show that rhythmic movement lowers cortisol, releases endorphins and dopamine, and supports emotional regulation—making DMT effective for stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma. Grounding and repetitive movements also help regulate breath, heart rate, and intrusive thoughts.

From a broader therapeutic perspective, Dance Movement Therapy does not replace talk therapy; rather, it **complements it**. While cognitive therapies help individuals understand and reframe thoughts, and insight-oriented therapies explore emotional patterns, DMT helps people *feel* and *integrate* these insights through the body. For many, healing becomes deeper and more sustainable when the body is included in the process.

Beyond mental health, **movement supports physical well-being** as well. Dance improves circulation, flexibility, posture, coordination, and sleep quality. Feeling physically stronger and more present in one's body further supports emotional resilience and self-confidence - key factors in long-term mental well-being.

Importantly, Dance Movement Therapy is **inclusive and accessible**. No dance skill, choreography, or prior experience is required. There are no right or wrong steps -the focus is on how movement feels, not how it looks, i.e. the performance. This makes DMT particularly effective for children, individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions, and those processing grief or loss.

Long before psychotherapy existed, communities around the world used **folk dances** to unwind after long days. From Bhangra, Bihu, Garba in India to African tribal dances and Latin American circle dances, these shared movements helped release physical fatigue, ease mental tension, and foster belonging. Dance Movement Therapy brings this collective wisdom into clinical practice.

In an era where mental health care is evolving, DMT holds a unique and valuable place—reminding us that healing is not only something we think about, but something we move through.

As we step into the **New Year**, we wish our readers balance, resilience, and well-being. In our upcoming issues, we will continue the conversation on healing practices that connect mind, body, and community—one movement at a time.



२०१९

Dr. Aabha Pimprkar
Co-Editor

HEALING BEGINS WITHIN: SESSION ON MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Providence Girls' Junior College for Education, Civil Lines organized a mental health awareness session for their first and second year students in collaboration with Chaitanya Counselling Centre on mental health awareness, on 15th December, 2025. There were a total of 80 students who attended the session. The speaker was Rtr Devika Gokhale, psychologist at Chaitanya Counselling Centre.

All the attendees were D.Ed students, aspiring to become teachers- so the session began with why it is important as teachers to have positive mental health, since it would directly impact not just their lives but their students' lives as well. Skills like empathy, active listening, kindness and non-judgmental approach were discussed. A small quiz on sentences about mental health and suicide was then conducted, where the students had to tell if the given statement is true or false. This set the stage for further discussion on the common mental health issues they face and a model to explain the causes of these mental health issues. Signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety were also discussed and the students were also educated on identifying the red flags and when to seek professional help. Another point covered in the session was why one shouldn't follow the advice of random social media influencers for mental health issues and why checking the credibility of the professional before seeking help is very important. Positive coping skills were then taught to the students which can be done on a personal level to manage their mental health better. The session got an amazing response, hoping for further collaborations in the future. Principal of the college, Sister Megha and Teacher Anmol Varghese ensured smooth conduction of the session.

-Rtr Devika Gokhale
Counselling Psychologist, Nagpur



ANCESTRAL WISDOM IN COMMUNITY DANCE AND COLLECTIVE SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE

Long before dance entered auditoriums or acquired refined technique, it lived in open spaces where life unfolded collectively. It belonged to temple grounds, village squares, threshing floors, and festival streets. People did not gather to perform- they gathered to move together. The rhythm was not background music; it was the organising force that aligned breath, body, and emotion. In these shared movements, ancestral wisdom was not taught. It was embodied.

Across cultures, community dance has evolved in response to lived realities. Agrarian cycles, seasonal uncertainty, illness, loss, and collective joy all found expression through movement. Folk dance forms such as kolattam, kummi, garba, dandiya, bhangra, theyyam, lavani, and yakshagana were never isolated artistic expressions. They were social rituals. Participation mattered more than polish. Repetition mattered more than novelty. Through rhythm and synchrony, communities created emotional steadiness without ever naming it.

The foundations of dance and movement therapy remind us that **movement precedes language and that the body serves as an early and enduring medium of communication.**

Ancestral societies intuitively understood this truth. **When people moved together to a common beat, breathing patterns aligned, muscular tension softened, and emotional intensity found containment. What contemporary psychology describes as regulation and co-regulation was instinctively practised through these communal dances.**

Different regions developed distinct movement vocabularies shaped by geography, occupation, and belief systems. **Circular dances fostered equality and shared presence. Line formations reflected cooperation and collective strength. Percussive footwork echoed labour rhythms, while gentle swaying mirrored the cycles of nature.** These forms trained bodies to endure hardship while remaining emotionally connected to the group. **In times of distress, the community already possessed a living mechanism for processing fear, grief, and uncertainty together.**

Spiritual resilience emerged not from doctrine, but from experience. **Community dance created a sense of belonging that softened individual suffering. The body was not corrected or judged. It was welcomed. Elders moved alongside children. The grieving moved beside the celebratory. In this shared space, emotional expression became permissible, safe, and held.** The individual did not disappear, but was supported by the rhythm of the collective.

Modern dance and movement therapy draw directly from this ancestral lineage. The discipline recognises the unity of body and mind and honours movement as a carrier of emotional history. It reframes dance away from performance and toward relationship, expression, and healing. The same principles that sustained folk communities now inform therapeutic work in hospitals, schools, rehabilitation centres, and community settings. The circle, the rhythm, and the shared pulse remain central.

In a time marked by fragmentation and isolation, ancestral community dance offers a quiet but powerful reminder. Healing does not always arrive through words or analysis. Sometimes it arrives through synchronized steps, shared rhythm, and the reassurance of another body moving beside us. Our ancestors understood this deeply. **When life became overwhelming, they did not withdraw. They gathered. They moved. And in moving together, they found resilience.**



-Dr Sripriya Shaji Ph.D
Counselling Psychologist & Nutritionist
Srisha Counselling, Kozhikode

FROM RITUALS TO THERAPY: THE EVOLUTION OF DMT

For a long time, dance/movement therapy (DMT) was largely identified as something from the United States. In recent years however, the field of mental health has expanded, integrating different disciplines with itself for holistic healing. DMT is one of them which is an **integration of psychological, social, creative and somatic perspectives.**

In therapy, it is believed that human beings don't just have emotional and relational needs but biological needs too. The ability to express emotions and thoughts, to feel understood and to belong meaningfully with others is the core of psychological well-being. **Strained relationships, traumatic events and even a disconnect with one's own self may develop distress that often emerges in ways words alone cannot fully capture.** Dance/movement therapy developed in response to this reality during the early 1950s, as movement began to be recognised as a valid form of emotional communication. It was no longer approached only as performance or technique, but **as a way of expression and communication.** Over time, it turned into a therapy that combines movement with psychotherapy and it has continued to evolve across cultures.

Long before DMT was named as a therapy, movement held an essential place in healing practices within early tribal and folk communities. Dance was a part of their daily life, helping people relate with nature, mark important life transitions and strengthen their bonds amongst each other. It made people recognise the **deep connection between body and mind**, something that DMT is based on.

In India, the growth of dance/movement therapy is slowly emerging with an increased interest in expressive approaches in mental health. Since the early 2000s, organisations have worked to adapt DMT as per the culture and social situations. **Kolkata Sanved**, established in 2004, has been especially influential in applying DMT within psychosocial rehabilitation and work with survivors of violence. **The Creative Movement Therapy Association of India (CMTAI)**, formed in the late 2010s, has focused on professional development, training, and awareness-building. More recently, the **Indian Association of Dance Movement Therapy (IADMT)**, founded around 2019, has worked toward ethical guidelines, professional recognition, and the strengthening of the field nationally. Together, these efforts reflect the emergence of dance/movement therapy in India as a culturally responsive, embodied psychotherapeutic practice.

-Devika Gokhale
Counselling Psychologist, Nagpur



DMT FOR NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

Children experience the world first through their bodies. Long before words take shape, movement becomes a child's primary language. Crying, reaching, crawling, rocking, stillness, excitement, and restlessness are not just actions—they are expressions. Even after verbal language develops, the body continues to speak. Posture, gestures, energy levels, and rhythm quietly reveal emotions and needs that words may not yet hold.

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) rests on a simple but powerful understanding that the body carries our inner experiences. Feelings, thoughts, and levels of regulation often reveal themselves through movement, tension, and shifts in energy. DMT honours the deep connection between body and mind, recognising that many emotions are felt and expressed physically before they are understood through language.

Unlike dance, which is often shaped by structure, rhythm, and performance, movement in DMT is guided by the individual's inner world. There are no steps to follow and no right way to move. Where dance invites adaptation to an external form, DMT follows the person's internal rhythm, allowing movement to become a meaningful form of communication rather than something to be perfected.

Movements such as rocking, pacing, spinning, pressing into the floor, slowing down, or remaining still are understood as meaningful expressions of inner states. Rather than viewing these movements as behaviours to be controlled or eliminated, DMT observes and responds to them as forms of communication.

For individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders such as **Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, learning disabilities, intellectual disability, developmental coordination disorder, and global developmental delay**, this approach can be particularly supportive. Many individuals within this group experience differences in verbal expression, sensory processing, attention, motor planning, or emotional regulation. However, their bodies often remain expressive and responsive. Through movement, they are able to express emotions in a safe and non-verbal way, release built-up physical and emotional tension, and gradually develop a stronger sense of bodily awareness, regulation, and ease.

In practice, Dance Movement Therapy often begins with **simple grounding movements** that help individuals gently arrive in their bodies and feel oriented to their surroundings. The therapist may follow or **softly mirror** the individual's movements, creating a sense of being seen, understood, and accompanied without the need for words. Sessions may include slow, **rhythmic movements** that support calmness and safety, stronger movements such as pushing or stamping that allow the release of held energy, and stretching or reaching that helps ease physical tension.

Simple props such as scarves or soft objects may be used to invite expression, explore space, and build body awareness in a playful and non-threatening way. **Shared movement activities** such as **moving together, responding to each other's rhythms, or taking turns** help nurture connection and trust. These experiences support social awareness and emotional connection, allowing relationships to develop naturally and without pressure.

It is a process of listening through the body, where movement becomes a gentle bridge between emotion and expression, body and mind, and the individual and their environment—allowing connection and growth to emerge naturally.

-Aditi Sethi

(Counselling Psychologist & Trauma informed therapist)



Scan the QR to access all the
issues of **Mind Matters**



mindmatterseditor@gmail.com

INTEGRATION OF DANCE & MOVEMENT THERAPY IN REHABILITATION

Healing is not always about words. Many times, emotions, memories, and trauma are stored deep in the body, beyond what language can easily express. This is where **Dance Movement Therapy (DMT)** offers a powerful bridge between the body and the mind. By integrating DMT with psychotherapy and rehabilitation, healing becomes more holistic, human, and accessible. **Simple body movements, guided rhythm, and mindful expression allow individuals to reconnect with themselves in a safe and non-judgmental way.** For someone struggling with anxiety, depression, trauma, neurological injury, or physical disability, movement becomes a gentle language of release, awareness, and renewal.

When combined with psychotherapy, dance movement therapy strengthens emotional expression and self-understanding. Traditional talk therapy helps people make sense of their thoughts, while movement helps them *feel* and *process* emotions physically. This integration is especially valuable for individuals who find it difficult to verbalize pain, such as children, trauma survivors, or patients with cognitive challenges. In rehabilitation settings, DMT adds motivation, joy, and dignity to recovery. Movement exercises designed with therapeutic intent improve balance, coordination, confidence, and emotional resilience. Instead of feeling like a patient undergoing treatment, the individual experiences recovery as an active, creative, and empowering journey. Together, psychotherapy, rehabilitation, and dance movement therapy create a compassionate model of care, one that treats not just the illness or injury, but the whole person.

-Randeep Kumar

Founder, Jamitson Healthcare



EDITORIAL TEAM

- | | |
|-------------------|------------|
| • Rita Aggarwal | :Editor |
| • Aabha Pimprikar | :Co-Editor |
| • Sripriya Shaji | :Co-Editor |
| • Devika Gokhale | :Reviewer |

DMT IN GERIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH

The global increase in the geriatric population has led to a rising prevalence of mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, mild cognitive impairment (MCI), and dementia (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). While pharmacological interventions remain central to treatment, they often have limited effectiveness in improving emotional well-being, social connectedness, and quality of life. In this context, Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) has gained recognition as a holistic, non-pharmacological intervention for geriatric mental health.

The therapeutic effectiveness of DMT can be understood through several mechanisms. **Rhythmic movement activates** multiple neural networks, learning movement sequences enhances cognitive engagement, music stimulates emotional and autobiographical memory, and **group movement fosters social bonding** (Koch et al., 2019). Moreover, DMT provides a non-verbal channel for emotional expression, making it especially valuable for individuals experiencing language deterioration due to dementia.

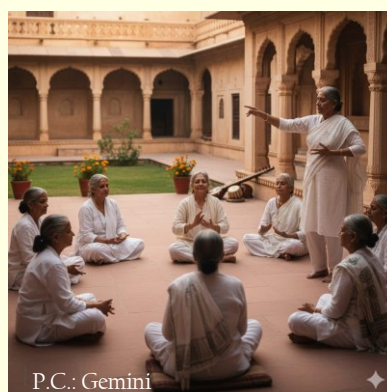
One commonly used DMT intervention is **Seated mirroring**, wherein the therapist initiates slow, simple movements that participants reflect at their own pace. This practice enhances attunement, non-verbal communication, and relational connection, and has been found particularly effective in dementia care (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009). **Rhythm-based movements**, such as clapping or foot tapping to a steady beat, support motor coordination, timing, and grounding, making them beneficial for individuals with Parkinson's disease and anxiety (Hackney & Earhart, 2010).

Similarly, **Breath-to-movement exercises**, involving gentle arm movements synchronized with breathing, aid in autonomic regulation and relaxation (Payne, 2006). Moreover, **Emotion-in-motion** exploration allows older adults to express affect through movement when verbal expression is limited, supporting emotional processing in depression and cognitive decline (Levy, 2005). Additionally, **reminiscence-based movement**, drawing on familiar life roles and culturally meaningful activities, strengthens identity, memory, and dignity (Karkou & Meekums, 2017). The core premise of DMT is the inseparability of mind and body—a principle particularly relevant in older adults, where psychological distress often manifests somatically.

From the perspective of Indian psychology, movement has long been regarded as a pathway to consciousness and balance. The Indian Classical dance forms draw its foundation from **Nataraja (Shiva), the cosmic dancer**, embodying the principles of rhythm (tāla), movement, and expression. If we closely take a look at the idol of Nataraja, he is depicted dancing upon **Apasmara**, the demon representing ignorance, forgetfulness, and loss of awareness—concepts that closely resemble modern understandings of cognitive decline (Kramrisch, 1981) which often occur in old age. This depicts a powerful symbolic parallel. However, Nataraja does not destroy the demon. Rather, he subdues and controls by dancing upon him. This emphasizes regulation rather than eradication (Coomaraswamy, 1918). Similarly, DMT does not eliminate dementia but may support emotional regulation, reduce behavioral and psychological symptoms, and enhance quality of life in individuals living with dementia (Karkou & Meekums, 2017; Koch et al., 2019).

Thus, DMT with older adults emphasizes safety, slow pacing, repetition, and cultural sensitivity, making it a valuable therapeutic approach in geriatric mental health settings along with pharmacological interventions. It bridges scientific evidence and indigenous wisdom, offering a culturally resonant, embodied, and dignified approach promoting better quality of life for geriatric populations having mental health concerns.

-Rucha Kare (Goa)
Senior EAP Counsellor,
Silver Oak Health (Bangalore)



P.C.: Gemini

BOOKS ON DMT:

1. Dance Movement Therapy: A Creative Psychotherapeutic Approach by Bonnie Meekums
2. The Art and Science of Dance/Movement Therapy: Life Is Dance edited by Sharon Chaiklin & Hilda Wengrower
3. Dance/Movement Therapy for Trauma Survivors: Theoretical, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives edited by Rebekka Dieterich-Hartwell & Anne Melsom
4. Dance and Creativity within Dance Movement Therapy: International Perspectives edited by Hilda Wengrower & Sharon Chaiklin
5. My Body, My Wisdom: A Handbook of Creative Dance Therapy by Tripura Kashyap

WEBSITES TO FIND TRAININGS IN DMT OR A DMT THERAPIST IN INDIA:

1. Indian Association of Dance Movement Therapy (IADMT)- <https://www.iadmt.org>
2. Chaari (Creative Movement Therapy)- <https://chaari.in/>
3. SRCC Dance Movement Therapy Centre-
4. <https://srcc.org.in/dance-movement-therapy-centre/>

REFERENCES:

1. American Dance Therapy Association. (2014). What is dance/movement therapy? ADTA.
2. Chaiklin, S., & Wengrower, H. (2009). The art and science of dance/movement therapy: Life is dance. Routledge.
3. Coomaraswamy, A. K. (1918). The dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian essays. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
4. Hackney, M. E., & Earhart, G. M. (2010). Effects of dance on movement control in Parkinson's disease: A comparison of Argentine tango and American ballroom. Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine, 42(2), 133–139. <https://doi.org/10.2340/16501977-0512>
5. Ho, R. T. H., Fong, T. C. T., Chan, W. C., Kwan, J. S. K., Chiu, P. K. C., Yau, J. C. Y., & Lam, L. C. W. (2018). Psychophysiological effects of dance movement therapy in older adults with mild dementia: A randomized controlled trial. Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences, 73(4), 560–570.
6. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbw138> (<https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbw138>)
7. Karkou, V., & Meekums, B. (2017). Dance movement therapy for dementia. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2, CD011022. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD011022.pub2>
8. Koch, S. C., Riege, R. F. F., Tisborn, K., Biondo, J., Martin, L., & Beelmann, A. (2019). Effects of dance movement therapy and dance on health-related psychological outcomes: A meta-analysis. The Arts in Psychotherapy, 63, 101–113.
9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2019.101>
10. Kramrisch, S. (1981). The presence of Śiva. Princeton University Press.
11. Levy, F. J. (2005). Dance movement therapy: A healing art. American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
12. Payne, H. (2006). Dance movement therapy: Theory, research and practice (2nd ed.). Routledge.
13. Wang, S., Yin, H., Meng, X., Shang, B., Meng, Q., & Zheng, L. (2023). Effects of dance-based therapy on cognitive and mental health outcomes in older adults with mild cognitive impairment: A systematic review and meta-analysis. BMC Geriatrics, 23, 617. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-04406-y> (<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-04406-y>)
14. World Health Organization. (2017). Mental health of older adults. WHO.